United Nations S/2003/348

Security Council

Distr.: General
20 March 2003
English
Original: Russian

Letter dated 20 March 2003 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the statement on Iraq of 20 March 2003 by the President of the Russian Federation, V. Putin.

I would be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be distributed as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Sergey **Lavrov**

03-28929 (E) 200303 200303

Annex to the letter dated 20 March 2003 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement by the President of the Russian Federation

Today the United States of America started military action against Iraq. Already there are human victims and destruction. A whole region is under the threat of a large-scale humanitarian and environmental disaster.

Let me stress from the outset that the military action is taking place in defiance of world public opinion and in violation of the principles and norms of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Nothing can justify this military action — neither accusations that Iraq is supporting international terrorism (we have never had, and still do not have, information of this kind), nor the desire to change the political regime in that country, which is in direct contradiction with international law. Political regimes can be determined only by the citizens of the State in question.

Finally, there was no need to launch military action in order to answer the key question that was posed directly by the international community, namely, does Iraq have, or does it not have, weapons of mass destruction, and if it does, what should be done, and within what time frame, in order to liquidate them?

Furthermore, at the start of the operation, Iraq posed no threat either to neighbouring States or to other countries or regions of the world because, especially after a 10-year blockade, it was a weak country, both militarily and economically. It was even less of a danger because international inspectors were working there. Indeed, their activities had recently produced significant positive results.

I should like to note that joint work within the Security Council, including joint work with the United States of America, and the unanimous adoption of resolution 1441 (2002), which does not authorize the use of force, but made it possible for the activities of the international inspectors to resume, as well as a range of other measures taken to pressure the Iraqi leadership, marked the start of practical activities to disarm Iraq by peaceful means.

In this connection, regafdless of how the situation around Iraq develops, on behalf of the Russian Federation, as a permanent member of the Security Council, I should like to express gratitude and appreciation to the Secretary-General and the international inspectors. They performed their duties conscientiously and with integrity, and in the process displayed a high level of professionalism and courage. I am sure that the institution of international inspectors will be called upon again by the international community.

The military action against Iraq is a major political mistake. I have already referred to the humanitarian aspect. However, the threat of the disintegration of the established system of international security causes at least as much concern.

If we allow international law to be replaced by the "law of the fist", whereby might is always right and is entitled to do anything and, in choosing the means to achieve its ends, is not constrained by anything, then one of the basic principles of international law will be called into question, and that is the principle of the

immutable sovereignty of States. And then no one, not a single country in the world, will feel secure, and the vast hotbed of instability that has now emerged will spread and will have negative consequences for other regions of the world.

It is for these reasons that the Russian Federation insists on the early termination of military action. We remain convinced that the central role in resolving crises in the world, including the situation around Iraq, must belong to the Security Council.

I should like to stress that the Russian Federation is committed to trying to put this situation back on a peaceful course and to achieving a genuine solution of the issue of Iraq on the basis of Security Council resolutions, a solution that would take into account the legitimate interests of the Iraqi people and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of that country.

The Kremlin, Moscow, 20 March 2003